

THE
ABSOLUTE
AND
Peremptory Decree
OF
ELECTION
TO
ETERNAL GLORY
REPROBATED.

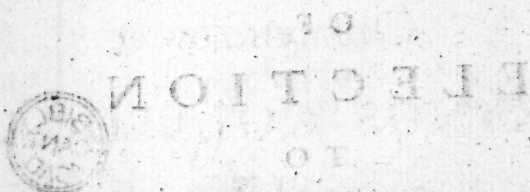


In A SERMON Preached before
the University in Great St. *MARIES*
Church in *CAMBRIDGE*.

By *Robert Neville*, B.D. Rector of *Ansty*.

L O N D O N,
Printed for *Benj. Billingsley*, at the Printing Press
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THE
ABSOLUTE
Necessity



ETERNAL GLORY
REPROBATED

75:25
In A SERMON preached before
the University in Great St. MARTIN'S
Church in CAMBRIDGE.

By Thomas Newbould, B.D. Rector of St. Andrew's Church, Cambridge.

LONDON:
Printed by J. Sturges, at the Printing Press
in St. Dunstons Church-yard, 1755.

To my Truly
HONOURED FRIEND,
and *quondam*
Chamberfellow at
KINGS COLLEDGE
IN
CAMBRIDGE.
THOMAS FOUNTAIN, Esq;

Honoured Sir,

There are two dangerous Opinions in
the World, against which, as a-
gainst two Rocks, we may suffer
Shipwrack, Pelagianism on the One hand,
and Calvinism on the other; these are the
Scylla and Charybdis, between which if
we do not steer our Course evenly and care-
fully,

The Epistle Dedicatory.

fully, we may Ruin and Undo our selves : Pelagianism pleads too much for a Natural Power and strength in man ; it ascribes too much to man, and makes him by Nature Omnipotent ; it makes a God of him in Power and strength : And Calvinism, like Medusa's head in the Poet, turns men into stones, robs them of all their Powers and Faculties, and determines them irresistibly to all their Actions, by a Necessity no less unavoidable, than the falling stone moves towards the Center ; the latter of these Opinions wrongs Nature in defect, by allowing her no strength, which by Consequence must make men desperate ; the first wrongs Nature in Excess, by allowing it too much strength, which must needs blow men up with too swelling a Confidence ; and both of them do equally destroy the reason of our Application to God for strength ; for neither will the man that is well in Conceit, nor yet the desperate, apply himself to a Physician ; because the
one

The Epistle Dedicatory.

one cries there is no need, the other, there is no help. The former of these two, namely Pelagianism, sets up and trafficks upon its own Credit, and depends upon the large stock of its own natural Abilities; and scorns to own the Grace of God so far, as to take it into a share and Partnership with it: The other, namely Calvinism breaks, when it needs not, and then declares it self a bankrupt, and pretends Insufficiency, that so it may upon easier terms Compound with God for its debt of Obedience; because the Absolute Decree of Reprobation hath taught men to fancy they have no power, it also makes them to have no Will to obtain Salvation; They are of opinion, that the Goats are more numerous than those few Sheep, which are within the little Fold of the Absolute Decree of Election; which is diametrically Opposite to St. Pauls Doctrine, 1 Tim. 2. 4. That Christ will have all men to be saved; and as contrary to St. Peters 2 Pet.

The Epistle Dedicatory.

3. 9. *who affirms, that the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance; and having so good Seconds as these, I shall not need to fear to enter into the Lists against the Asserters of that unjust Decree; A Decree too Arbitrary and Tyrannical to be Enacted by the just, gracious, and merciful King of Kings; A Decree, as Arbitrary as that Government, their great Patron Calvin set up at Geneva, after the Expulsion of their Lawful Bishop; to whose both doctrine and discipline your great Reason and Learning have always made you a professed Enemy; so that I assure my self that you will kindly accept of, and not pass your Decree of Reprobation against this discourse now devoted to you by*

Honoured Sir,

Astx, Octob.

Your Faithful and

25. 1682.

humble Servant,

R. Neville.

A
SERMON

Preached before the
UNIVERSITY,
At Great St. *MARIES* CHURCH
IN
CAMBRIDGE.

EPHES. I. the former part of the 4th. Verse.

According as he hath chosen us in him before the Foundation of the World.

THere is no one Conceit that engageth men so strongly to persist in Sin, as the Perswasion, that Gods Irresistible Decree is the Cause of all Events, of all their
B Acti-

The Absolute Decree of

Actions; and though they are not arrived to so high a degree of Blasphemy, as to adventure to Define God, *totidem verbis*, the Author of Sin: yet (which is tantamount) some men are of Opinion, that because all things depend on Gods Decree; all the Sins they commit, are entailed upon them by *A Fatal Necessity*; and that they are but as so many links of one *Fatal Chain*, wherewith they are fetter'd and fast bound to Satan; and that all their Care and Industry cannot take off one Link from that Chain; nor Deduct one single transgression from the whole Sum, and numberless number of their iniquities.

Others again, on the other hand, think they have Gods *Absolute Decree* for their security; and ground their hopes of Heaven upon no other basis, no other bottom, letting loose the reins to all licentiousness, because they assure themselves that Gods Decree of *Election to Eternal Glory* is pass't in favour of them: When alas, that *Decree of Election*, which they build upon, is grossly mistaken by them: God having determin'd by his Decree of giving Christ, to call men from a vicious course of Life to Christianity; which is onely an *Election to Evangelical Grace and Holiness*; and a separating men to the participation of those singular benefits, contained in the Gospel,

Gospel,

Gospel, not an Absolute Decree of Election to Eternal glory, without any regard of their Works and Actions : and this is clear and evident from this Clause of the verse, that contains my Text, [*that we should be Holy and without blame before him,*] which immediately follows these words of my Text, *According as he hath chosen us in him before the Foundation of the World.*

In which words are these two general parts.

First, *Gods Eternal Decree of Election* [*He hath chosen us before the Foundation of the World.*]

Secondly, *The Authour, the Procurer of this Decree, namely Christ,* [*He hath chosen us in him*] *in or through Christ :*

First on the

First, *Or Gods Eternal Decree of Election* [*He hath chosen us before the Foundation of the World*] for the better understanding whereof, 'tis necessary to acquaint you with a threefold acceptation of this word [*Election.*]

First, It imports some special Dignation and Favour, or a special separation of some persons, to any particular Office or Function: in which

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sense, *Luke 6. 13.* Christ is said to have chosen twelve, whom he named Apostles : Or else it implies some eminent Prerogative, and Dignity, given to one above another, without any intention of excluding the person, that is not so Dignified, from Eternal Salvation ; and in this sense I take those words, *Rom. 9. 11. that the purpose of God according to Election might stand ;* where the word [*Election*] signifies a special separation of *Jacob*, to an eminency and Prerogative above *Esau* ; because God had said *verse 12. The Elder shall serve the Younger ;* and *verse 13. Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,* but this is not the sense that the Text here speaks.

Secondly, The word, Election, or Choosing, imports a peremptory Decree of Election to Eternal Life : and in this notion 'tis most frequently taken by Divines ; but the word [*Chosen*] in the Text will neither admit of this sense ; but imports rather

Thirdly, An Election to Evangelical Grace, or Gods free and undeserved Mercy, in Decreeing to bestow Christ upon all, as the most Effectual meanes to engage men to Holiness of Life ; that is, by what Christ hath done
and

and suffered, for Gentiles as well as Jews, to call and bring home sinners of all sorts to Repentance ; and this farther appears from the ninth and tenth verses of the chapter of my Text , where , *the Mystery of his will according to his own good pleasure* (which is all one with his choosing us, here in the Text) is specified to be, the gathering of all things, both Jews and Gentiles together in Christ : and this is the Subject of the second chapter, and of a great part of this Epistle.

Now that these words [*He hath chosen*] imply onely an Election to Evangelical Grace, and not any Absolute Decree of Election to Eternal Glory ; I shall further evince and manifest to you, by these following reasons and arguments ;

First, Because God hath declared in Scripture, that those, who believe in Christ, and persevere in that Faith, shall be saved ; and that such, as will not believe in Christ, nor persevere in that Faith , shall be Damned ; Which declaration of his is inconsistent with any such Absolute Decree.

Now the Adequate Objects of the Divine and Peremptory Election to Eternal Glory, are All, and onely Such, who believe in Christ,
and

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and persevere and dye in that Faith : and the Objects of Reprobation are such, and onely such, who either believe not, or persevere not in their Faith : *John 3. 36. He that believeth on the son, hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him : and John 6. 40. This is the will of him that sent me, that every one, which believeth on the son, may have everlasting life. And as the objects of the Divine Election are such as believe, so are they also such as persevere in that Faith, Matth. 24. 13. He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved, and the first Epistle of John 2. 24. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the son, and in the father ; i. e. you shall continue in the favour of God. From which places of Scripture it is clear and eminent, that when any mention is made of Gods Will and Decree, either of saving or damning any ; no other Will or Decree, of his is meant, but onely that, whereby he will save Believers, and damn all Unbelievers.*

Secondly, No *Absolute Decree* can be inferr'd either from this, or any other Text of Scripture ; because thereby we should destroy the nature of Grace and Virtue ; which are nothing else,

Election Reprobated.

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else, but an Habitual Power and ability in the rational Soul of man, to bear all sensible pain and loss, and forbear all sensible pleasure and profit, out of love to Reason, and the Divine Law : this excellent power and ability of the Soul, as far as 'tis natural, or acquir'd by our own acts and endeavours, is of moral Consideration ; but as it is supernaturally wrought in the Soul, or infused into it by the Spirit of God, so far it concerns Theology, and is above the sphere of morality ; but because Grace is confest by all to be the perfection of Nature ; and acquir'd and infus'd virtue are not *Αντισετα*, or inconsistent ; I have thrust them into one definition, in which Divines and Philosophers both agree : Now if we were determin'd irresistibly either to Vice or Virtue, by any peremptory Decree of the Almighty's ; this definition of Grace or Virtue, would be a vain and useless notion ; and all the Divines and Philosophers, that have been since the Creation, would have been great Cheats and Impostors : and all the excellent Discourses to incite men to Virtue, or deter them from Vice, which they have penn'd with such admirable Reason and Rhetoric, would be but idle and unprofitable Harangues ; and as insignificant to the impotent race and nature of men, as the practical Rules of Dancing to a crip-

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Cripple, or a Metaphysical Lecture to a natural Fool : to which I may also superadd, that Virtue and Vice would be dash'd together and confounded, were our Actions the result of necessity, occasioned by any such Decree; for as Justin Martyr saith very well, (a) If it be fatally Decreed, that one should be good, another bad, the one cannot be approved or accepted, nor the other blam'd or censur'd : Now if any such Absolute Decree should be supposed to be pass'd in favour of any; we must either Assert, that God Decrees to Save them, be they never so leud and dissolute, which is contrary to the whole Tenour of the Gospel; or else that God does irresistibly determine them to the use of such means, as must necessarily bring them to heaven; which would make men utterly incapable either of Reward or Punishment; for as Clemens Alexandrinus hath truly told us, (b) Neither Rewards, nor Punishments are just, if the Soul hath not a free Power both to embrace and refuse evil. Neither is it possible any man should repent of doing what he could not but do, or of omitting to do, what was never in his power to effect, no more than that he cannot fly like a Bird, or move like an Angel : I must indeed confess, that it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, Phil. 2. 13. but this

is

(a) εἰ μὲν
καταδικάσθαι
πρὸς ἀγαθόν
εἶναι καὶ ὁ Θεὸς
ἀποδέχεται,
ὅτι καὶ ἐπὶ
κακοῦ ἐκείνου
ἐπιμένει.

(b) εἰ δὲ αἱ κο-
νάσεις δικαίαι,
καὶ τὸ ψυχῆς
ἔχουσιν τὴν ἐξ-
ουσίαν τὸ ὀρμεῖν
καὶ ἀπορμεῖν.

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is so far from taking away our power, that 'tis brought as a reason by *St. Paul*, why we should work out our Salvation, spoken of in the twelfth verse : God does indeed work it in us ; but how ? By giving us the knowledge of his promises, by exciting and strengthening us by his Spirit : He works it who supplies us with all sufficient means to work it ; he does it, but not without us, not whilst we lye like men asleep, or like dead men in their graves : God works the Ability to Act, but not the Act it self ; for if he did, it would be his Act, not Ours ; much less does he work it forcibly, and irresistibly ;

And though by his primitive and natural will, he would have all men happy ; happiness having been the very end of their Creation ; and though he forbids sin, and detests it, as contrary to his Essential Goodness ; yet he may justly permit it ; and the will of man may have in it self a power for natural and sinful actions : it may resist Gods grace, it may obstruct its workings and operations, it may receive the grace of God in vain ; and *Heb. 10. 29. Do despite to the Spirit of Grace,* and *Jude 4. abuse and turn the grace of God into wantonness* : I shall conclude this particular, with

God

C

those

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(a) Θυ το χα-
ρισμας ουδ
το λαβειν η
απορηται.

those words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem (a) It is Gods part to bestow Grace, but it is your parts (as ye are men) to receive and keep it.

Thirdly, No Absolute Decree of Election can be supposed to be made by God, because he hath granted the will of man a Patent for Freedom; which freedom is incompatible with any such Decree. We are not drawn by secret and invisible wiles, but move voluntarily, and from a principle within; we are not hurried by external accidents, but steer our own course; we are free Agents; and God made us so when he made us men; and our actions are voluntary, not necessary, (b) Goodness (saith St. Basil) is the work of our will and choice, not of necessity; if it could be wrought in us against our will, it could not be Goodness or Virtue. They who would have been wiser than God, and seemed to murmur, that in their natural Constitution there was not a necessary of being good, and an impossibility of being evil, did (as St. Basil tells them) (c) neither love goodness, nor hate wickedness; and that in this vain desire, to raise man to that pitch, which nothing but phantse could set up, they much dishonour'd him; and that in seeking to make him more than an Angel, they made him less than a man.

(b) Αρετη ου
αναγκηστος
ουκ εστι αναγκη
γινεσθαι.

(c) ουδ φιλει
το αγαθον ουδ
μισει το κακον.

God

God made man after his own image, indu'd him with a reasonable Soul, having the use of Understanding, and freedom of will; he gave him power to consider, and deliberate, to consult and choose, whereby he was made master of himself, and Lord of his own actions: for if God should force the will of man, it were (in effect) a destroying the nature of his Creature, which the grace of God was never designed for, but rather to strengthen and assist it. We read indeed of infused Habits; and what then? Though we should, as we may, grant that good habits are infused to us, yet they are not infused without our own concurrence: they are poured into us, not as water into a cistern, but as into living Vessels, fitted and prepared for them; for if they were infused into us without our own aid or help, without our preparing our selves for their reception, they could never be lost.

God onely uses such means to save us, as are necessary for one, who is to deal with rational Creatures, and such as he intends either to reward or punish: He makes use of his Calls, his Promises, his Threatnings, his Judgments, his Grace Preventing, Exciting, and Assisting; in a word, he uses all means but violence and coercion: If we were under the ties and re-

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straints of necessity, or were overpower'd by some secret irresistible Cause, we should not be so much Agents, as Patients, and be the objects of Compassion, rather than of censures or Penal Inflictions : from whence Porphyry was wont to say, (a) *He that is moved by Force and Compulsion, is no less where he was, than if he had not been moved at all;* for whatsoever alteration in appearance may for the present be made by Necessity and Violence, when the Compulsion is taken off, every thing returns to its first natural state : But without peradventure in all moral Accounts, Man is to be supposed to be in that State, in which his own choice did first place him, and in which he would still have been, had not violence removed him : So that Seneca was in the right, when he said (b) *Necessity is the great Sanctuary of humane Infirmary, which excuses all its Acts of Compulsion.*

(a) ὁ βιαζόμενος
ἐν τῇ ἰσχύϊ
τῶν ἀνδρῶν
ἀδυνάμει
ἡσυχάζει.

(b) Magnum
humana imbecil-
litas patrocini-
um necessitatis,
Quae quicquid
cogit excusat.

(c) Ut bonum
non necessitate
obiret, sed vo-
luntate.

(d) Nulla laws
est non facere
quod non potes.

God hath placed before every man Good and Evil, that he (c) might do good, not out of Necessity, but willingly, saith St. Cyprian; for 'tis no Commendation not to commit that Evil, which we had not the Power to Act, (d) saith Lactantius : Will you say a Lion is a Lamb, when he is within the Grates ? Will you call an Eunuch chaste ? Or a man in fetters patient ? Was Bajazet no

Ty-

Tyrant when he was in the Iron Cage ?

In this consists our Obedience, that we many times do That which is contrary to our own inclinations ; but that we always do That, which if we would, we might not have done : For 'tis impossible for any finite Creature, who hath not his compleatness and perfection within himself ; to purchase Heaven upon other terms than these, *that he might have lost it* : St. *Augustin*, that great Champion for the grace of God, saith, (d) *A man may Sin, and deny God, but he doth not unless he will* : in a word, God Commands Obedience, but doth not Force it. In fine, if any shall be so irrational, as to maintain the Necessity of sinning, they run into that absurd paradox of the Stoicks, and place all sins upon the same level of equality, equalizing the smallest frailties and infirmities of humane Nature to the most horrid and flagitious crimes ; they multiply sins at a strange rate, but withal lighten the weight, and extenuate the guilt of sin, allow it to be onely a Notion, and instruct men to entertain slight thoughts of it ; For prevention whereof it will be necessary to acquaint you, that all the Providences of God, how apt soever they are, in their own Nature, to affect the Spirits, and awaken the Consciences of men ;

(d) *Homo potest peccare, & Deum negare, sed si nolit non facit.*

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men ; yet being intended by God onely as motives, perswasives, and convictions ; and not designed as instruments of violence to force the Soul, leave men still in the Natural Liberty of their wills ; and work in such manner, as is fit for a reasonable Soul, not leading it in chains, nor dragging it by Violence like a Slave. And

(a) ὁ κύριος Θεὸς
δυσκλιδὲς εἰς
διεργασίας
ἀφαιρῶν δὲ τὴν
ἐκείνου γνῶσιν
παραγέσθην.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem speaks the same sense ; (a) God is prone to Beneficence and Mercy, but yet he expects that the will of every man should accompany his Grace and Goodness, by making a good Choice, and this is rendred as the reason of mens being rejected by God, Prov. 1. 29. Because they did not choose the fear of the Lord : Sin, as St. Cyril of

(b) κακὸν αὐ-
τοβούλον, ἐκ δὲ
σημείου τῆς προ-
φῆας.

Jerusalem affirms, is (b) An Evil, but Voluntary, Branch, that grows from free will ; and that we sin voluntarily, the Prophet tells us, Jer. 2. 21. I had planted thee a noble Vine, wholly a right seed, how then art thou turned into a degenerate plant of a strange Vine unto me ? Upon which words the

(c) ἡ φύσις
καλὴ, ὁ καρπὸς
κακός, ἐκ τῆς προ-
φῆας τὸ κα-
κὸν ὁ φύσις
ἀναιμῶν, &c.

forenamed Father makes this Descant ; (c) The plantation was good, the fruit evil, and that evil was chosen, he that planted it therefore is not culpable, because it was planted to a good end, though willfully it brought forth bad fruit : for, as the Royal Preacher saith, Eccles. 7. 29. God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions ; so that you see plainly, man is so

set in the Horizon, either of Happiness, or Mi-
sery, that he may betake himself to which of
the two he pleases, and make himself either a
Saint of Heaven, or a Fiend of Hell, either an
Angel, or a Devil. God would not limit his
happiness, he left him power to encrease it, to
polish and beautifie himself; or if he refuse it, he
gives him liberty to ruin himself; according to
that of the Prophet, *Hos. 13. 9. O Israel thou
hast destroyed thy self.*

Fourthly, No *Absolute Decree* of Election can
ever be supposed to have been made by God,
because Christ died for all; which could not
be said, if there were any such Decree, onely to
choose some few persons to Eternal Life, and ex-
clude all others: Now that Christ died for all,
is clear and evident, from *1 Tim. 2. 5, 6.*
*For there is one God, and one Mediator between God
and Men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a
ransom for All, and (as it is in the 4th. verse of
that chapter) will have all men to be saved; the
force of which words the Contra-Remonstrants
endeavour to avoid, by telling us, that the
word [All] is to be taken there, not Pro singu-
lis generum, sed pro generibus singulorum; not for
all of every kind, but for some few onely of
every sort and nation; which distinction of
theirs*

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theirs cuts the sinews of the Apostles Exhortation, and enervates the strength of his reasoning: For these words of his [*who will have all men to be saved*] are used by St. Paul as an Argument, why Prayers and Supplications are to be made, not onely for Kings, and all that are in Authority, verse 2. but also for *All Men*, verse 1, and that because God will have all men to be Saved: Now if these words [*All Men*] were to be understood of some few onely of every sort and Nation, the Scripture might have said with far more reason, that God will have *All Men* to be damned; since that of every Nation and Condition, (according to the Contra-Remonstrants) the number of the damned does far exceed the number of the saved; and reason requires, that the Denomination should be taken from the Major part. Our safest position then concerning Christs death and satisfaction, is this, that he died for *All*: For those that *Perish*, as well as for those that *Perish* not; Luk. 19. 10. For all that were lost; That Christ died for the Elect, the Contra-Remonstrants themselves will grant; and that he died also for Castaways, and those that *Perish*, is clear and evident from 1 Cor. 8. 11. where the Apostle tells us, that unless we temper our Christian Liberty with prudent Charity, 'tis possible that through our

-know-

knowledge a weak Brother may perish for whom Christ died: One for whom Christ died (if St. Paul speaks truth) may perish, and be a castaway; and the words in the following twelfth verse do more strongly confirm this Truth; where the Apostle saith, *When ye sin so against the Brethren, and wound their weak Consciences, ye sin against Christ, to whom they were so dear, that he was willing to dye for their Salvation; and that therefore we sin against Christ himself, whilst by our imprudent use of our Christian Liberty, we rob him of any of those, whom he Redeemed, not with Corruptible things as Silver and Gold but his most precious Blood.*

1 Peter 1. 18. Christ tasted Death for every man? for the ungodly; *Romans 5. 6.* In due time Christ died for the ungodly? for the unjust, *1 Pet. 3. 18.* For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Christ died for Judas as well as Peter, as Judas and Peter were both sinners, *quoad Impetrationem Reconciliationis*, as to the Impetration of Reconciliation, which was obtained for All, promiscuously, and without distinction, as Sinners. But onely the Faithful, Penitent, and Obedient, are concerned in the Fruits, and good Effects, of this Reconciliation; of which

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Judas could not participate, because through his own default, he was an Infidel, an Unbeliever: The Death of Christ was not as Beneficial to *Judas*, as to *Peter*; because *Judas* super-added a new Infidelity to his former sins, which *Peter* did not.

Christ hath purchased Salvation for as many as will believe it; *He shed as much Blood for Judas as for Peter*. *Peter* Believed, and Repented and was therefore saved; *Judas* would not believe, and was therefore condemned.

And now let me remove one *Objection* of the *Contra-Remonstrants* against the universality of Christ's satisfaction, and I will conclude this particular.

They Object,

“That the Death of Christ is, in itself, a sufficient ransom for the whole World, if we look upon the intrinsic worth and value of it; but that Gods Decree, and Christ's intention was, that a few persons only should receive the benefit of it.”

What is this better, than to cast a Reflection upon Gods Justice, and blemish his Goodness? For, if God (after he hath declared in Scripture, that *John 1. 29. Christ is the propitiation* for

for the Sins of the whole World) should secretly Resolve and Decree, not to extend the benefits of his Death to one half of it, but confine them onely to some few *Select Persons*; we might justly impeach his Truth and Sincerity, question his Justice, and say *Gen. 18. 25.* *Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?* If the Death of Christ were sufficient for All, and yet All were not redeemed by it; the impediment must be either in God, who will not accept this ransom, or in Christ that offers it; there being no impediment in those, for whom 'tis offer'd; which, if any, must be their sins: but they can be no impediment, because the Ransom was paid to take away sin, according to that of *John 1. 29.* *Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the World;* therefore the impediment must be in God; who will not allow that Christ's death should be sufficient for all; and so Gods Secret Will must be repugnant to his Revealed Will in Scripture; which but to imagine, is to abuse his Sincerity and Justice; and make him like the Inhabitants of *Biscay*; who, when any of the *Spanish Kings* come into the Frontiers of their Countrey, customarily proffer him some few small pieces of Brass, called *Maravides*; but

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tell him withal, that he must not take them : So these men make God offer the Blood of his Son to all mankind for their Redemption ; but then they say his *secret Will* and *Decree* is, that they shall not *All* take or receive, the benefit of it. And what is this better than to make God injure his own Justice, and trapan and mock his poor Creatures ?

You see then there can be no impediment in God ; and as not in him, so neither in Christ, that offers this Ransom : For if, as the *Calvinists* affirm, the sufficiency of the Ransom were, in it self, the Cause, that that might be rightly said to be given for *All*, which is onely given for some few, because in it self it was sufficient for *All*, though God would not allow, that *All* should enjoy the benefit of that sufficiency ; then Christ might be said to have died, even for Infidels, and Unbelievers, as such ; because the price of Christ's blood, if considered in it self, in its own worth and value, is sufficient even for the Redemption of these ; when yet, according to Gods revealed will in Scripture, though Christ obtained Reconciliation for all, the benefit thereof accrues onely to those, that Repent of their sins, and apply

apply that Reconciliation to themselves in particular, by Faith and Obedience; and this brings me to the Fifth reason, *Why no such Absolute Decree of Election, to Eternal Glory, can ever be supposed to be made by God;*

And that is,

Fifthly, Because Christ, who died for *All*, shed forth his Blood, upon terms befitting Mercy and Justice, which could never have been, if there were any such Decree; and this invites me to take in the

Second General Part in the Text; where we have the Author, and Procurer, of this Decree of Election, namely Christ; *He hath chosen us in him, in Christ; Matthew 26. 28.* this, saith Christ, *is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins;* and this effusion was, upon terms befitting Mercy and Justice: For though God was mercifully affected towards man, yet out of respect to his Truth and Veracity, he would not allow his Mercy to save any, till his Justice was satisfied; and therefore he made *Christ*, who shed his blood for us, the Foundation of our Election; and that not in the sense of the Contra-

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Remonstrants; who tell us, that God first decreed the Salvation of some few Select persons, and then the giving of Christ, as a means to bring this Decree to pass; so that with them, God the Father is the Author of our Election, Christ but the instrument or executor, whereas (if we will not derogate from the power of Christ) he is to be so held the Foundation of our Election, as to be the Author and Procurer thereof: Christ paid the large score of our sins by his precedent satisfaction, before God would choose any person to Life Eternal; not that God could not have acted otherwise, but that he might have some regard to his abused Justice, before he opened a door of Mercy: 'Tis true indeed, that his Will and desire, to save Sinners, went before either the Actual giving, or his Decree to give them a Saviour; for *John 3. 16.* God is said to have loved the World, and out of his love to have given his Son: but That his Will, or Desire, was no peremptory Decree to save sinners; for then the whole satisfaction of Christ would have been vain and unprofitable; because there would have been no need of His being reconciled, who did before love peremptorily, and with so great a Love, as to confer eternal Life upon

upon those, who were the Objects of it : so that Christ may be styled the Foundation of Gods Decree of Election upon a double account.

First, Because unless Gods Decree of giving a Mediator had gone before, there had been no place for his Decree of saving them, who believe in this Mediator.

Secondly, Because this Mediator satisfied the Divine Justice, which before obstructed God's being simply Reconciled to sinners ; so that That satisfaction to Gods Justice being first made, God resolved afterwards to carry on the whole business of our Salvation, by that very Mediator, by whom his Mercy and Justice were reconciled ; by that Mediator, who *Titus 2. 14. Gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.* Now to what end did Christ bleed a whole Life for sinners, if God had before determined, that onely some few select persons, tyed fast to him by an *Absolute Decree*, should tast the benefits of his Death ? Hear therefore what *Clemens Romanus* says in this case ; let us consider how precious his blood is to God ; which being shed for
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(a) *πῶς ὁ
νόμος ἡμε-
τέρος ἔσται
ἀντιθέτος.*

our Salvation, (a) "brought to the whole World the grace of Repentance: You see then, that whoever espouses the Doctrine, of an **ABSOLUTE DECREE**, seems to contract the beams of Gods Love, and Philanthropy, which are universally diffused upon all, who do not (as that sullen Tree in India does it leaves against the beams of the Sun) willfully close their eyes against them.

There is no person now under Heaven, for whom Christ did not dye; Christ's Death is no enclosure, no Monopoly for some few, it is common to *All*; His blood is a *universal* remedy for the sins of the whole World.

I now come to the Uses that may be made of this whole Discourse; is it so that no Absolute Decree of Election can be inferr'd either from this or any other Text of Scripture? this then may serve,

USE, I.

First, To comfort those, who are under the dismal Apprehensions, that they are (by some secret Decree of Gods) made Reprobates to all Eternity, whereby they are sunk into the

the very gulph of Despair ; which makes them phanſie the terrors of the Divine vengeance ſet in Battle Array againſt them, and the Curſes of the Law thundring out their ſentence of condemnation : and the mouth of Hell gaping wide, to ſwallow them up and devour them : theſe frightful apprehenſions do continually haunt them, like ſo many ghoſts and Apparitions ; and follow them, like their own ſhadows. To whom let me return this answer ; that this their fear is groundleſs and unreaſonable ; and that it is onely, either ſome ſudden ſtorm raiſed within them by the power and ſubtilty of the Devil ; or elſe it is the reſult of their Melancholly, which is of a very impreſſive temper, and Poetic Nature ; and is apt, like a dark room, to receive in the Images of Objects without, in very ſtrange and monſtrous Shapes and Representations ; let them therefore be couragious, and rouze up their fainting and deſponding Souls ; for there is help at hand ; there is an immoveable Rock for them to Anchor upon, in the miſt of theſe waves of deſpair, which will not ſuffer them to be quite overwhelmed by them ; they have a Merciful and Loving Saviour, who by the ſacrifice of himſelf hath purged away their
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finns, and delivered them from the curse of the Law, and the Wrath to come; and satisfied the Divine Justice, and obtained Reconciliation and pardon for them: O then if there be any consolation in Christ, let them raise up their drooping and dying Spirits! Let them not Dye, onely out of a fear and Apprehension that they must Dye! Let them not determine and devote themselves to Death by a fatal Necessity! God hath passed no Absolute Decree of Reprobation against them, and why then should they Enact one against themselves? If they will be saved, they may; God affords them the helps of his Grace and Spirit; Let them not therefore shut the mouth of the bottomless pit upon themselves, nor (like contented Vassals) kiss their chains, and hug their fetters being their own Jailors. The door is open, they may come out, there is Light enough to guide them out, and all the darkness, they were in, shall vanish at the brightness, of Gods Grace and Mercy, as a Mist before the Sun; Let them therefore rowl away those Grave-stones, they have pulled upon themselves, by the strength of their phansie and imagination! Which they will be the better enabled to Do, if they will but consider, that
they

they, who sincerely endeavour to please God, and keep his Commandments, have not the least ground from Scripture, to suspect any secret Decree of Gods, that shall cause their Ruin or Damnation : and whatever the secret Decrees of God are, concerning the Eternal state of men, they must not be made by them, the standard and rule, either of their Duty or Comfort : Let them not therefore search into Gods secret Decrees, but his Revealed Laws ; and since he hath given them rules of Life, which (upon the severest penalties) he requires them to Study and Practice : let them not turn aside from these, and make it their business to trace his Cabinet Counsels : let them not gaze at the Stars to read their destiny, and not look to, but disregard their feet, and by that negligence experiment the worst Fate, they could have portended ; For, I think, we may say, our wild fancies about Gods Decrees, have in event *Reprobated* and *Damned* more, than those Decrees, upon which they are so willing to charge their ruin. And as the thoughts of Gods Absolute Decree of Reprobation should not drive men into despair, on the one hand ; so neither should the thoughts of their being chosen by Gods Absolute Decree of Election make

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them presumptuous on the other; and this brings me to my

II. *USE*, or use of Reproof to those *Predestinarians*, who think they are so fast ty'd to God by his Absolute Decree of Election to Eternal Glory, and that they are such special Confidants and Favorites of Heaven, that all their sins shall not be able to separate them from the Love and Favour of God: they have, through the false perspective of presumption seen their names written indelibly in the Book of Life, and are therefore of opinion, that all their Provocations and Rebellions against Heaven, cannot disturb their Horoscope, nor reverse their fatal and destin'd bliss and happiness; and herein they resemble the Scholars of *Marcus* in *Irenaeus*, who pretended, they were *φύσιν πνευματικοί*, naturally spiritual, and that they could be no more blemish'd or tainted, by all the sins and debaucheries in the World, than the Sun-beams can be prophaned or sullied by a Dunghill: but let me tell those, who have espoused this dangerous Opinion; that continuance in sin, and Gods favour, are inconsistent; that there is no Absolute Decree of the Almighty will secure Heaven to them; their Holiness is the best security,

curity, that they can give, or God will take for it: This is the Tenour of the Gospel, and this is the summ of our Commission, that are the Preachers of it: We cannot give out Copies of Gods Decrees, or give men an immediate Assurance of Heaven, but we must proceed, by a just inference from those Conditions, and Qualifications, which the Gospel exprestes: We search not the Records of Heaven, but the Books of the Scripture; whereby *Isa. 3. 10, 11.* We may say to the Righteous, that it shall be well with him; and to the wicked, that it shall be ill with him; which is the same sense with that *St. Augustin* spake when he declaimed against the Fate and Necessity of the Stoicks, (a) *God hath Decreed to reward Goodness, and punish wickedness: If therefore you desire that Heaven and Happiness should make their approaches to you, make you your approaches to God in Holiness; Jam. 4. 8. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.* This is the standing Law of Heaven, and God will not recede one Iota or tittle from it: For, it is not because our Brains are filled with a strong Conceit of Gods Eternal Love to us, or because we swell into a mighty bulk with airy fancies and presumptions of our Election, that we become the more dear and acceptable to

(a) *Deus Prædestinavit bonitati mercedem tribuere malum punire.*

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to God ; unless our sins sink, as our Hopes keep up, unless our sins Ebb as much as our Hopes do flow : It is not a pertinacious imagination, of our Names being enrolled in the Book of Life, or of the Debt-books of Heaven being crossed, that can Entitle us to Heaven ; Nor will the fancying our sins washt away with the blood of Christ, whilst the foul stains thereof remain in our Souls, make us ever the Cleaner ; he who thinks, that God is so certainly espoused to his soul, as to be bound to take it for better, for worse, being far from the Kingdom of God : To which Kingdom that we may All at length arrive, God preserve us all from this fatal and dangerous Opinion, either of Absolute and Peremptory Election, or Reprobation ; and this we beg of him for the sake of that Mediator, whose Blood was a Propitiation for the sins of the Whole World ; to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all Honour, and Glory, and Praise.

F I N I S.

Three Sermons lately published by the same
Author and sold by *Ben. Billingsley*.

1 **A** Sermon Preached before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen of the City of *London* at *Guild-hall*.

2 The necessity of Receiving the Holy Sacrament, declared in a Sermon at a Conference of the several Ministers of the Deanry of *Braughlin*, in the County of *Hertford*, appointed by the Right Reverend Father in God *Henry* Lord Bishop of *London* to be held at *Ware*.

3. The great Excellency and Usefulness and Necessity of humane Learning, declared in a Sermon preached before the University, at Great *St. Maries* Church in *Cambridge*, Aug. the 7th. 1681.

As also another by an Ingenious Author.
The *Italian* Ship or *Pauls* Transportation to *Rome* a Discourse on *Acts* the 27 and 15 made on *March* the 20th. 1681. by *Will. Ramsey* B. D. and then Lecturer in *Isleworth* in *Middlesex*.